

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 16, 2006

The Honorable Ralph Regula
Chairman
House Subcommittee on Labor, HHS,
Education, and Related Agencies
Appropriations
2358 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Obey
Ranking Member
House Subcommittee on Labor, HHS,
Education, and Related Agencies
Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Regula and Ranking Member Obey:

As you prepare the Fiscal Year 2007 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bill, we urge you to ensure that federal funds are not spent on abstinence-only programs that include medically inaccurate information.

As you will recall, the Senate unanimously adopted language last year on this point and 105 House members signed a letter in support of this provision. The Senate bill simply stated: *"None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to provide abstinence education that includes information that is medically inaccurate. For purposes of this section, the term 'medically inaccurate' means information that is unsupported or contradicted by peer-reviewed research by leading medical, psychological, psychiatric, and public health publications, organizations and agencies."* Unfortunately, this language was not included in last year's final bill.

The United States has one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the industrialized world. In fact, 34 percent of young women become pregnant at least once before the age of 20. Of these pregnancies, eight of 10 are unintended. And yet we are spending soaring amounts of taxpayer dollars on programs that contain inaccurate information on contraception and sexually transmitted diseases. Curricula used in many of these programs greatly exaggerate condom failure rates for pregnancy prevention, without providing information about consistent and correct condom use. Others give dangerously false information about HIV, with one teaching that tears and sweat can transmit the virus.

While we may differ on how best to educate our nation's young people to make smart, healthy choices, there should be no disagreement on the fact that our children deserve accurate, honest medical information. As guardians of the taxpayers' dollars, this is our responsibility.

A report prepared by the Government Reform Committee's minority office paints a disturbing picture of the programs we are currently funding, finding commonly used curricula rife with scientific inaccuracies, factual errors, and troubling biases. The report found that curricula used by more than two-thirds of federally funded community-based


abstinence grantees "contain false, misleading or distorted information about reproductive health." Some examples include:

- Misinformation about pregnancy prevention. Multiple programs understate the effectiveness of condoms in preventing pregnancy. For example, one program teaches that, "Couples who use condoms to avoid a pregnancy have a failure rate of 15 percent." (Choosing the Best Way Leader Guide, 33.) The program does not explain that the failure rate for consistent and correct condom use is between two and three percent.
- Misinformation about HIV prevention. Though the CDC has found that correct and consistent condom use is "highly effective" in preventing HIV, many programs falsely understate condom effectiveness. For example, one curriculum states that, "Condoms appear to reduce the risk of heterosexual HIV infection by only 69 percent." (Me, My World, My Future, 141.) In addition, one curriculum teaches that tears and sweat can transmit HIV, though according to the CDC there have been zero documented cases of transmission by these substances. (WAIT Training, 219.)

Even some of the strongest supporters of abstinence-only programs have acknowledged these substantial defects. Ron Haskins, a former congressional staffer widely acknowledged as the architect of federal abstinence-only programs, recently said, "Well, you know, it's a big problem. And there are some mistakes that are being made. And we're going to make sure that those get corrected. We don't like mistakes either; we shouldn't present bad information." ("What Should Young People Be Taught in Sex Education? Comprehensive Sex Education vs. Authentic Abstinence"; Heritage Foundation; February 8, 2005.) Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist has said that if programs are presenting inaccurate information, they "should be reviewed." (ABC's This Week with George Stephanopoulos; December 5, 2004.)

We have an obligation to present honest, truthful information to our nation's young people, and to act as responsible guardians of taxpayers' dollars. As such, we urge you to include the medical-accuracy language that the Senate adopted last year in the Fiscal Year 2007 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bill. Our teens – and our taxpaying constituents – deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,


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Member of Congress
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Member of Congress

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cc: Nita Lowey
Member of House Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education, and Related Agencies
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